

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 07867 021324Z

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, BG, IN

SUBJECT: EDITORIAL REACTION TO ZIA'S REFERENDUM VICTORY

1. THREE NEW DELHI NEWSPAPERS JUNE 1 RAN EDITORIALS CRITICAL OF GENERAL ZIA'S RESORT TO A REFERENDUM, CALLING IT NO SUBSTITUTE FOR A GENERAL ELECTION AND INDIRECTLY QUESTIONING ZIA'S MOTIVES FOR THE VOTE. THE "TIMES OF INDIA" ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE REFERENDUM WAS FAIRLY HELD AND THAT ZIA'S PERSONAL POPULARITY WAS NOT IN DOUBT. BUT, THE TIMES SAID, A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE FOR ZIA PERSONALLY CANNOT BE SEEN AS A VOTE FOR THE PERPETUATION OF THE PRESENT REGIME NOR AS A LEGITIMATION OF THE SWEEPING AMENDMENTS MADE TO THE CONSTITUTION BY ZIA'S EXECUTIVE FIAT. THE REFERENDUM MAY ALLOW ZIA TO REORGANIZE HIS GOVERNMENT AND BROADEN HIS POWER BASE BY ENLISTING SUPPORT OF SOME POLITICAL PARTIES BUT, THE EDITORIAL CONTINUES, A REFERENDUM "IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR A GENERAL ELECTION THAT ALONE CAN DETERMINE WHICH POLITICAL PARTY SHOULD HAVE HOW MUCH SAY IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE GOVERNMENT." THE TIMES CONCLUDED, "AND YET, FOR REASONS BEST KNOWN TO HIM, PRESIDENT ZIA DOES NOT WANT TO HOLD A GENERAL ELECTION UNTIL DECEMBER 1978, WHICH IS A LONG, LONG WAY AWAY."

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 07867 021324Z

2. THE "HINDUSTAN TIMES" CRITICIZED THE CONDUCT OF THE REFERENDUM BECAUSE ZIA'S CRITICS WERE NOT ALLOWED TO CAMPAIGN. IT EQUATED A REFERENDUM AS A MEANS OF ESTABLISHING A MANDATE FOR A RULER OF THE "SINGLE-SLATE ELECTIONS IN THE SOVIET UNION AND THE SO-CALLED PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACIES." WHILE THE REFERENDUM FORMALIZES THE SITUATION IN BANGLADESH AND AMOUNTS

TO AN ENDORSEMENT OF THE COUP WHICH BROUGHT ZIA TO POWER, THE EDITORIAL CONTINUES, IT DOES NOT ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT BANGLADESH'S FUTURE "BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT BEEN ALLOWED TO BE POSED." THE EDITORIAL QUESTIONED THE ARGUMENTS USED BY ZIA TO POSTPONE THE GENERAL ELECTIONS AND SAID THAT THE ONLY WAY TO INDUCE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION AND TO ISOLATE ELEMENTS BENT ON DESTROYING A PLURAL SYSTEM IS TO HOLD ELECTION TO LET THE PEOPLE CHOOSE THEIR REPRESENTATIVES.

3. THE INDIAN EXPRESS CALLED THE REFERENDUM "A POINTLESS POLL". ITS EDITORIAL STATED THAT ASKING THE VOTERS IF THEY HAD CONFIDENCE IN GENERAL ZIA AND HIS PROGRAMS "WAS NOT A FAIR QUESTION TO ASK WHILE THE COUNTRY WAS UNDER MARTIAL LAW AND OPPOSITION TO THE REGIME FORBIDDEN." THE EXPRESS SAID THAT THE PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH HAVE NOT CHOSEN THE FORM OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WHICH IS AN INTERIM ADMINISTRATION DUE TO REPLACEMENT. "THERE WAS NORMALLY NO NEED TO TEST THE POPULARITY OF WHAT IS SUPPOSED TO BE A TEMPORARY GOVERNMENT. FROM THE FRAMING OF THE ISSUE AT THE REFERENDUM, IT APPEARED THAT PRESIDENT ZIA WANTED A PERSONAL VOTE OF CONFIDENCE BIG ENOUGH TO HOLD HIM UP AS THE INDISPENSABLE LEADER OF BANGLADESH WELL BEYOND DECEMBER 1978."

4. TO DATE, THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA HAS MADE NO OFFICIAL COMMENT ON THE RESULTS OF THE REFERENDUM.
GOHEEN

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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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